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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Detroit, Michigan

**U.S. ATTORNEY ANNOUNCES CRACKDOWN ON GANGS
IN THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF MICHIGAN**

United States Attorney Stephen J. Murphy announced today that his office has charged 50 individuals, in five separate indictments, with various drug trafficking and firearms violations.

Mr. Murphy was joined in the announcement by Valerie J. Goddard, Special Agent in Charge, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), Andrew G. Arena, Special Agent in Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and Robert Corso, Special Agent in Charge, Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA).

United States Attorney Murphy stated, "These indictments serve to demonstrate my office's commitment to executing our anti-gang strategy, a coordinated local-state-federal initiative to root out and eradicate organized gangs engaged in drug trafficking and violence. I commend the hard work of the federal agencies and their partners that lead to these charges being brought."

ATF Special Agent in Charge Goddard stated, "Identifying and investigating armed drug gangs is a top priority for ATF and our law enforcement partners. We know that guns and drugs go hand-and-hand and can escalate violent crime rates. Through aggressive enforcement of the gun laws we can successfully arrest and convict violent drug gangs."

FBI Special Agent in Charge Arena stated, "The FBI will continue to address the rising problem of gangs and violent crime occurring throughout Michigan. We will continue our aggressive and cooperative efforts with our federal, state and local law enforcement partners to combat gang violence and violent crime in order to make our cities and streets safer for our citizens."

DEA Special Agent in Charge Corso stated, "The arrests that stemmed from these investigations are strong examples of the positive results that can be achieved when state, local and federal law enforcement agencies work together to fight gang related drug trafficking. DEA is committed to making our community safer by focusing its efforts on dismantling violent drug gangs and all others involved in this illicit activity."

The indictments are as follows:

United States v. Viramontez et. al. (06-20470). The superseding indictment alleges that Anthony Viramontez, the long time leader of the Latin Counts street gang, and seventeen others conspired to distribute cocaine and running a criminal enterprise. The indictment charges that Viramontez used the co-defendants in a variety of capacities, such as runners, laundering money, and enforcing the collection of drug debts. Viramontez is a large scale, long time cocaine distributor who operated mainly in the Detroit Metropolitan area. If convicted, he faces a minimum of twenty years in prison. Each of the individuals charged with him face up to 40 years in prison, if convicted.

United States v. Hardin et. al. (07-20076). The indictment alleges that Dominique Hardin, the leader of the "575" drug gang and nineteen others conspired to possess with intent to distribute and to distribute cocaine, 50 grams or more of cocaine base, and 100 kilograms or more of marijuana. Hardin used the co-defendants in a variety of capacities, including working as operators for the 575 customer service telephone line used for street level sales of controlled substances. Hardin is a cocaine and marijuana distributor who operated mainly in the Northwest Detroit area. If convicted, Hardin and his co-conspirators each will face ten years to life in prison.

United States v. Slewa et. al. (06-20529). The indictment alleges that during the month of February 2006, five defendants conspired to intentionally and unlawfully distribute and possess with the intent to distribute at least 454 kilograms of marijuana. Each of the individuals charged face up to 40 years in prison, if convicted.

United States v. Bashir et. al. (06-20679). The indictment alleges that during the month of August 2003, six defendants conspired to intentionally and unlawfully distribute and possess with the intent to distribute over 100 kilograms of marijuana. In addition, two of the defendants have been charged with possession a firearm in furtherance of a drug trafficking offense and possession of a machine gun and one defendant has been charged with being a felon in possession of a firearm. Each of the individuals charged face up to 40 years in prison, if convicted.

United States v. Yousif (05-80823). The indictment alleges that from January 2001 to the present, Prince Khalid Yousif conspired with others to intentionally and unlawfully distribute at least 100 kilograms of marijuana in the Eastern District of Michigan and elsewhere. If convicted, he faces up to 40 years in prison.

Of the 50 defendants charged, 13 were arrested today and appeared in federal court in Detroit and 11 have already been arraigned.

The Eastern District of Michigan established a Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) gang task force last year which is composed of representatives from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, Drug Enforcement Administration, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and U.S. Marshals Service, among others. The task force will create law enforcement strategies and operations across agency lines aimed at dismantling national and trans-national violent gangs. The task force will coordinate overlapping investigations, ensure that tactical and strategic intelligence is shared between law enforcement agencies, and serve as a central coordinating center for multi-jurisdictional gang investigations involving federal law enforcement agencies. The aforementioned indictments evidence some initial successes of the task force's work.

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